

# The Psychological System of Sithambara Munivar:

## A Critical Study

by

**Dr. K. LOGANATHAN**, M.Ed., Ph.D.,

[London MEIKANDAAR AADHEENA PULAVAR]

### Introduction

The history of Dravidian Psychology is a very ancient one. While the beginnings of it can be traced to the ancient civilizations that existed in the Indus, Sumeria, Elam and ancient Egypt, the historical period begins with Tolkappiyam which is placed around 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. The first half of its third book viz., *Porulatikaram* is in fact a thorough going behavioral analysis of people that included verbal and non-verbal actions. The *meyppattiyal* constitutes the world's earliest study of emotions and attitudes that is definitely scientific. In this analysis both social and psychological behaviors are seen as private and public reflections of some central and deep-seated psychic pressures viz., *punartal* (conjoining), *pirital* (separating), *iruttal* (conserving, maintaining), *irarikal* (being sympathetic, loving) and *utal* (quarrelling, disputing). At the time of Tolkappiyam such forces were assumed to create an inner ecology, one type corresponding to each one of these almost instinctive forces: *Kurinci* (The mountainous tract), *Palai* (the arid and desert like regions), *mullai* (the forest tract), *neytal* (the sea and the sea sides) and *marutam* (the agricultural tracts) in that order. The deviant and abnormal behaviors were not assigned any ecological regions at all. The five inner ecologies, described in terms of the geographical features, were also considered ruled over by some deities such as Murukan, Korravai, Mayon Varuna and Indra. The implication is that the inner ecologies presided over by the divine powers constituted the acceptable, ethically speaking, while the others were non-acceptable-deviant, abnormal and so forth.

This search for the inner determinants of behavior continued giving rise to the tantric system of *Kundalini* yoga where the inner ecologies were now described in terms of cakras. A transitional point was *True Murukarru Patai*, where inner ecology was described, not in terms of the geographical, but in terms of the temple and what is available there. In this development the primordial psychic forces were not taken any more fundamental but rather as special cases of something more universal viz., the processes *srusti* (creation, origination), *titi* (being, existence), *cankaram* (annihilation, destruction), *trobhava* (engulfing in ignorance) and *Anugraha* (illuminating bestowing consciousness knowledge etc.) With the clear recognition of these five-fold universal processes begins the philosophical / psychological revolution of Meykandar from which the Dravidians have not escaped yet.

This study presents the views of Sithambara Munivar (17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century) who takes the concept of the five-fold processes to a new level of psychological explanation. The most remarkable feature is that he attempts to provide, probably for the first time in the long history

of Tamil culture, an explanation of the cognitive processes of perceiving, remembering, forgetting and so forth in terms of these five-fold universal processes. He does a lot more and this study presents only the essentials.

Subsequent to the philosophical psychological revolution of Meykandar in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century one could cite Cirrampalavar, the author of *Tukal Arul Potam* as the one who contributed most significantly to the growth of philosophy / psychology among the Dravidian people. No philosopher in the Tamil country could escape the insights of these two great thinkers and even such brilliant rebels as Kannudaya Vallal could not ignore the concept of *kalaral* introduced by Cirrampalavar.

In the readjustments that ensued, fresh intellectual efforts were made to seek greater perspicuity on the ancient problems of the relationship between man and God, the meaning of mukti and so forth the concept of '*kalaral*' simulated. One of the most significant attempts appears to be that of Sithambara Munivar, author of *Pancatikara Vilakkam* and the authoritative commentary on the difficult *Olivil Otukkam* of Kannudaya Vallal and the standard texts of Santhalinga Swamikal. In the present text appropriately named *Pancatikara-Vilakkam* viz., an explanation of the five-fold cosmic activities, the author unravels new insights into the cognitive processes of perceiving, reasoning remembering, forgetting, the deeper psycho transformational processes and how they are linked to the primordial and primary pancakritiyas viz., the five-fold activities of Paraparan so ably established in practically all the *Saivagamas*. In this respect the text is immensely interesting and rather original and definitely very psychological.

In the first part, the author attempts to provide a distinctly psychological theory of human happiness and miseries, using the traditional and well established notion of the primary processes of the world as consisting of *sristi* (origination, production, generation, creation), *titi* (conservation, maintenance, preservation, etc.) *cankaram* (annihilation, resolution, destruction, etc.) *tirobhava* (concealment, hiding, keeping in darkness) and *anugraha* (bestowal of grace, knowledge, consciousness; revelation, illumination, etc.)

## **Part I: The Psychological Relevance of the Pancakritiyas**

This part begins with the verses 7 and 8, where the author clarifies the concept of action and explains the reasons for Paraparan wanting to act thus.

He notes that in the affectation of any act, there are goals, intentions, objectives etc., as an action is always purposive. In this one may intend to achieve something for oneself or bring about a change for the benefit (or otherwise) of others. Now what one may wish for oneself could be the removal of some bodily and psychological pains or distress and so forth or the attainment of an object that is a source of pleasure or the attainment of social recognition, respectability and so forth.

The actions may also have consequences for others either beneficial or painful. In view of the purposive character of actions, Sithambara Nathar establishes the following criteria for the evaluation and comprehension of any act, including the cosmic

- i. The consequences they have for the agent.
- ii. The consequences they have for the others, and
- iii. The possibility of being ineffectual (*avappayan*) or inconsequential.

Without arguing whether such concepts derived from the social or interpersonal contexts of human interactions can justifiably be extended to the cosmic situation (possibly it being presupposed that it has been settled once and for all by Meykandar at all), he points out that Paraparan could not be effecting the five-fold activities for some selfish motives or other, for Paraparan, being pure, integral and not lacking in anything, could not have such desires. The affectations could not also be because of the playful nature, a lila of the Supreme Deity, for Paraparan is of Boundless Intelligence and Consciousness who dispels Darkness in the psychic constitution. The acts, for the same reason, cannot also be inconsequential, ineffectual. It is then concluded that Paraparan effects these activities for the *benefit* of the others viz., the innumerable constrained and suffering psyches out of no other reason than immense love for them.

An ordinary psyche is compared to a man who has lost his consciousness because of swallowing some poisonous drugs. He is alive but incapable of perceiving the happiness around him. He is insensitive, in capable of processing the sensory stimulations and thereby perceive, recognize, remember, recall, initiate actions and so forth. In a similar manner an ordinary psyche is also delimited, insensitive, incapable of processing a certain kind of information that is made available to it continuously, of recognizing them and becoming conscious of them. This incapacity is ultimately traced to the presence of a Darkness in the psychic constitution that makes the bulk of happenings within and without unconscious to the psyche.

The canonical texts in Saiva Siddhanta attribute this primordial Darkness in the psychic constitution to anavam – a blind and ubiquitous impersonal stuff that is just as *anati* (uncreated and eternal) as the *pacu* (psyches) and *Pati* (or the Paraparan of the present author). For an ordinary person many important things remain unconscious, beyond the reach of comprehension and understanding because of innate constitutional limitations – the presence of Darkness cause by anavam.

Now Paraparan, like a good physician who revives an unconscious person through appropriate medical prescriptions, provides different kinds of complex physical bodies to the psyches to remove the intrinsic blindness or unconsciousness that envelops them. This unconsciousness, it is implied, is also the cause for the various kinds of cravings such as for material wealth, self-knowledge etc. The Paraparan, it is said, in the guise of a guru also effects the therapeutic cure of the psychological distresses. Now a question with respect to the absence of uniformity in the provision of bodies and so forth is raised. Birds can fly but cannot crawl, dogs can bark but cannot talk and so forth. And within species too there are differences that are not insignificant. The primary question is however with respect to the bodies that are given to the *vinnanakalars*, the most highly developed among the psyches.

The verses 12 to 15 provide greater details about the manner in which Paraparan provides the bodies. The five-fold activities of origination, establishment, annihilation, concealment and revelation are enumerated as the primary processes, the basic activities of Paraparan without which we cannot have the empirical reality with the features that we observe to be true of it. In this, through the activity of origination, the psyches are provided with different kinds of physical bodies out of proto-matter that is termed *mayai*. Through the activity of establishment (in worldly existence), the psyches are enabled to *experience* pleasures and pains.

In other words, the psyches with a physical body endure and exist and experience pleasures and pains because of Paraparan who ‘protects’ or conserves (*kattal*) the creatures from being annihilated. Existence, which consists in experiencing pleasures and pains cannot be without *endurance*. Now the reabsorption of the bodies the us generated, to their primordial state is the annihilator function of Paraparan. Among the living creatures, it constitutes and among the non-living the biochemical process of decay death and atrophy. An interesting explanation is given about *tirobhava*, translated here as ‘concealment’. It is said to be the activity of Paraparan that *maintains* interest in living, a keenness to exist and struggle, the having of an instinct for survival and so forth. The Paraparan conceals Himself from the consciousness of the psyches so that they would persist in struggling, in living, in learning and so forth (till the time is appropriate for immediate presentation) Now *anugraha* is the component of the primary processes by means of which the psychic insensitivity is removed, consciousness is gained and knowledge is acquire. *Anugraha* or the inflow of Grace is that which facilitates *learning* in the most general sense and thus the acquisition of knowledge of whatever kind.

One is reminded here of Freud’s pleasure principle – a principle invoked to explain the universal desire for pleasures that is seen in all creatures. Sithambara Nathar attributes this to Siva-utensils, which interestingly enough, is said to function along with *vittya karanam* i.e., cognitive utensils. It appears that seeking of pleasures is a primary dispositional trait of all creatures which provide the impetus for acquiring knowledge and effecting various kinds of actions. It may be on account of this that Siva-utensils are said to be beneficial as well.

## **Part II: The Phenomenal Reality and The Pancakritiyas**

This part begins with arguments related to the reality of the pancakritiyas of Paraparan. It is stated that there are two stages in this viz., the intellectual conviction of their reality through rational enquiry and later the direct apprehension of them through various kinds of psycho-transformational technologies. Now we can dismiss the logical reasons Sithambara Nathar provides in the verses 16-22 as not something very profound or brilliant, nothing at any rate comparable to the brilliance of Meykandar or Arunandi. However, from verse 25 begins an account of the cognitive processes in the creatures and how they are related to the pancakritiyas an account that is immensely original and though-provoking. The author also appears to claim that what ensues is something new, a new ‘secret’ that is his good fortune to unfold. The new insight is this: the pancakritiyas are the fivefold activities that are observable or inferable in the cosmic processes – they are activities at the micro-level without which the

universe will not have the observable features they have. But in addition to these pancakritiyas being present at the macro level, they are also present in a subtle manner, in subtle causal states. The author claims that this new knowledge viz., how the macro-acts are present as micro processes in the world is a kind of knowledge that is liberating. Something that would enable a creature to reach the feet of Paraparan.

Paraparan is the absolutely autonomous and totally independent Reality and without His Cosmic Dance, there will be no universe, no change, no development, no growth, no activities, and processes whatsoever.

### **Part III: Aspects of Transformational Psychology and the Pancakritiyas**

We have already mentioned that what are termed *kevalam*, *sakalam* and *suddham* are evolutionary states with all the different creatures including man having evolved from the *kevala* state and existing now in the *sakala* state. The *suddha* state constitutes the future possibility in the *evolutionary* development, a state higher than which there is none. A psyche can attain the *para mukti*, only by first evolving into the *suddha* type of existential mode, a mode of existence of absolute purity and universal love. In the verse 31, it is explained that the creatures can evolve from the *sakala* state of existence to the final *suddha* state again through the appropriation of the five-fold activities of Paraparan. However, an important difference is noted. Unlike the attaining of knowledge through the various kinds of cognitional activities of perceiving, thinking, recalling etc., the evolution into the *suddha* existential state can be effected only through intense meditative absorption (*samadhi*). The procedures or technology described is then psycho-transformational, a technology that consciously effects evolutionary development into higher species. The evolutionary development of creatures in nature is unconscious, something that happens unknown to the creatures.

But here in the context of transformational psychology, evolutionary development has gone conscious, reduced into a systematic science. It must be mentioned here that Saiva Siddhanta system is the first system in the world to have recognized this possibility and developed a systematic technology for bringing about this development. Cirrampala Natikal the author of *Tukal Aru Potam* appears to be the first to have articulated this possibility and developed a systematic technology in terms of the central concept of disengagement (Ta. Kalaral). The verses 32 and 33 describe very briefly the six stages in this progressive development. More detailed descriptions are available in *Tukal Aru Potak Kattalai* and many other texts in Dasakarya. The central concept in all these is the progressive disengagement of the psyches from the 36 *tattuvras*, the primary constituents of the world process. The *tattuvras* are graded from the lowest *Prithvi* to the highest *Natham* and through a process of intense reflection and absorption, the psyches are required to affect a disengagement from them through severing the false self-identification with the *tattuvras* that has been the primary cause of creatures' existence and thereby effect the evolutionary progress. This, it must be noted, is not sufficient for attaining *mukti*. In addition to effecting disengagements, it must also be realized through reflection that the *tattuvras*, because they can be made objects of consciousness, cannot be intelligent and that the psyche which holds them in reflective consciousness is intelligent, in contrast to them. Further, it must also be realized through

reflection that the disengagement was in fact effected by Paraparan and not by the psyches through His Power of Grace (*Arul*).

More details as to how exactly the psychological transformation is effected by Siva, through His Dances within the heart of every creature become available in *Tirumantiram* (7<sup>th</sup> century). We cannot do full justice in the span of a few pages to the intricacies and depth that Tirumular reveals in *Tirumantiram*. We shall concentrate here only on one issue, perhaps the central issue, of the text. In the fourth *Tantra* (verses 884-1418), we have an extensive and detailed discussion of what Tirumular calls *sivayokam* but more popularly known as *Kundalini Yoga*. In depth and detail the text remains unmatched; the later developments such as that of Pokar and Korakkar (14<sup>th</sup> century) the famous sittas, given in such texts as Pokar '*elayiram*'. '*Candra rekai*' and so forth appear to be mere simplifications, betraying no important advance at all. In all these and similar accounts we note four distinct components:

- a. A description of the various kinds of *dances* effected within the body to account for the physiological and psychological processes;
- b. A description of the evolutionary progress of the psyches in terms of their location in the hierarchically organized *cakras* with each *cakra* having its own a Male and Female Deity pair as the animating intelligence;
- c. A description of psychic strategies of technologies in terms of *mantras*, *yantras* and so forth to affect the evolutionary ascension of the psyches, and
- d. A theoretical account of what really happens within and causes the upward progress of the psyches.

Among the dances, he distinguishes *arputam*, *anantam*, *anavaratam*, *pralayam* and *cankaram*. The *arputa tandavam* is the creative, generative activity; the *anantam* is that which furnishes happiness and pleasure; the *anavaratam* is that which sustains the autonomous bodily and other processes; *pralaya* is that which brings about sleep and such states and *cankaram* is that which dispels ignorance and facilitates the upward evolution of the psyches. It is stated also (verse 886) that these dances are enacted with the right side of the bran as the platform. It is also stated quite categorically that it is the mystic syllable *om* that becomes in fact all these dances and thereby the primary mode in which the primordial Siva-Sakti or Paraparan animates and regulates the cosmic processes including the psychological. The primary reason for enacting these dances is *anugraha* or the *Arul*, for it is stated in no uncertain terms that the dances are in fact the activity of *anugraha* (*tandavamanatu anugrahat tolil* -888) echoing Karaikal Ammaiyar's claim that it is *Arul* that rules the world. The Paraparan stands independently as the illuminating light, one with the *tattuvas*, becoming the *mantric* syllables 'A' and 'U' and the light that leads the dance of the *tattuvas* (verse 889).

The primordial *om* that becomes the five syllable *mantra* 'Na-Ma-Si-Va-Ya' is now given a symbolic significance each syllable becomes a technical name for the universal and primary force through the combinations and permutations of which the different forms of *cakras* are created and thereby the psychological propensities or natures of the psyches (verse



898, 999, etc.). The different combinations and reconstitutions of the primary force fields symbolically represented by the above five letters, are in fact the *dance*; the *kuttu* is none other than the different formations of the *mantras*, the force fields that remain an integral part of the primary processes (verse 912: *kutte-ci-va-ya-ma-ci-ayitum*.) The Paraparan creates the five basic elements, the different types of bodies for the creatures, sustains the universe and stays one with them through these five-fold fields (verse 966). It is these five-fold force fields that have evolved into the Vedas, Agamas and every other form of knowledge (verse 965).

### The Modern Relevance of the Text

In order to see more clearly the scope of the accomplishments of the author and what limitations, if any, exist that may point out directions for future investigations, let us note briefly the different strands of explanations that the text encompasses.

- a. The first part clearly is cosmological with focus on the evolutionary aspects of the living creatures. It is also simultaneously metaphysical. In the sense that a meaning for the world to be as it is given. The account is clearly theological with the whole cosmological processes making sense in terms of a purposive model. The universal processes have a direction, a goal and furthermore it is *intelligent*, the agent being Paraparan. The purpose for the universe to be and to be thus is the liberation of the countless number of psyches from being afflicted by the ever present and indestructible psychic constraints of various sorts, the primordial one being *anavam*, a stuff that envelops the psyches creating a Darkness in the constitution. The evolutionary development of all creatures is seen very broadly in terms of gross psychological states of *kevalam*, *sakalam suddham*, a progression that is in fact the reason for the universe to be with the structural diversity that is observable. The provision of the different bodies, the evolutionary development in bodily forms and so forth are seen as the products of the *pancakritiyas* of Paraparan.
- b. The second part contains many original contributions of the author that are clearly very psychological. The different contents can be seen as follows:
  - i. A theory of emotions where a distinction between psychic and physiological basis is clearly drawn.
  - ii. A theory of perception and other cognitive processes where such issues as recalling, recognizing, forgetting and so forth are dealt with.
  - iii. A theory of the commonly accepted existential states of vigilance, dream and so forth.
  - iv. The origin of psychopathological conditions and methods of regaining control over the inner processes so that normalcy is maintained.
- c. The third part contains an elaboration of what has come to be distinctive of Saiva Siddhanta viz., a theory of self-evolution and a technology for effecting

it, i.e., elements of what has been termed transformational psychology. It must be emphasized clearly that what is described here is not simply a theory of cognitive development such as that of Piaget in the West or even a variant of the different theories of personality development current in modern psychology. The transformational psychology is a psychology of *self-evolution*, the transformation of the species characteristics themselves through a technology that reaches the primary cosmic processes themselves, a willed transformation of the psyche so that it evolves from being a lower kind species into a higher species with the end state of this evolution being described as *paramukti* – the ultimate end to the ancient and long evolutionary progress of the psyches. This part also contains an account of the evolutionary stages brought about by this technology and their behavioral correlates. Such a psychology, it should be noted, does not yet exist in the West.

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